

**Amendments to the Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) An item sorting system, comprising:  
at least one sender handling unit by which at least one sender applies imprints to items to be delivered to at least one receiver, wherein an imprint as applied to an item includes a sorting identifier; and  
at least one receiver sorting unit for sorting received items in accordance with a sorting protocol as determined from the sorting identifiers of the respective imprints, wherein each sorting protocol provides for the sorting of each of the received items into one of a plurality of groups such as to allow for different handling of the items of each of the respective groups.
2. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the sorting identifier comprises a sender identifier which identifies the sender of the respective item.
3. (Original) The system of claim 2, wherein each sender is assigned a level of security and each of the groups has an assigned security level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the security level of the sender.
4. (Original) The system of claim 2, wherein each sender is assigned a level of urgency and each of the groups has an assigned urgency level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the urgency level of the sender.
5. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the sorting identifier comprises a security identifier assigning a level of security to the respective item and each of the groups has an assigned security level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the security level of each respective item.
6. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the sorting identifier comprises an urgency identifier assigning a level of urgency to the respective item and each of the groups has an assigned urgency level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the

urgency level of each respective item.

7. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein an imprint as applied to an item includes an item characteristic identifier, and each receiver sorting unit is operative to determine a match of at least one characteristic of a received item to the at least one characteristic as assigned to the item characteristic identifier.

8. (Previously presented) The system of claim 7, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises at least one physical characteristic.

9. (Original) The system of claim 7, wherein the at least one assigned characteristic is communicated to the receiver sorting unit independently of the item.

10. (Original) The system of claim 9, wherein the at least one assigned characteristic is electronically communicated to the receiver sorting unit.

11. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the imprints comprise barcodes.

12. (Previously presented) The system of claim 1, wherein the items comprise mail items.

13. (Currently amended) A method of sorting items, comprising the steps of:

~~at least one sender~~ applying imprints to items to be delivered to at least one receiver, wherein an imprint as applied to an item includes a sorting identifier;

determining a sorting protocol from the sorting identifiers of the respective imprints,  
and

~~the at least one receiver~~ sorting received items in accordance with a said sorting protocol ~~as determined from the sorting identifiers of the respective imprints,~~ wherein each sorting protocol provides for the sorting of each of the received items into one of a plurality of groups such as to allow for different handling of the items of each of the respective groups.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the sorting identifier comprises a sender identifier which identifies the sender of the respective item.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein each sender is assigned a level of security and each of the groups has an assigned security level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the security level of the sender.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein each sender is assigned a level of urgency and each of the groups has an assigned urgency level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the urgency level of the sender.

17. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the sorting identifier comprises a security identifier assigning a level of security to the respective item and each of the groups has an assigned security level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the security level of each respective item.

18. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the sorting identifier comprises an urgency identifier assigning a level of urgency to the respective item and each of the groups has an assigned urgency level such that the items are sorted into the groups in accordance with the urgency level of each respective item.

19. (Currently amended) The method of claim 13, wherein ~~an imprint as applied to an item~~ said imprint includes an item characteristic identifier, and further comprising the step of:

determining a match of at least one characteristic of a received item to the at least one characteristic as assigned to the item characteristic identifier.

20. (Previously presented) The method of claim 19, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises at least one physical characteristic.

21. (Original) The method of claim 19, wherein the at least one assigned characteristic is communicated to the receiver independently of the item.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein the at least one assigned characteristic is electronically communicated to the receiver.
23. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the imprints comprise barcodes.
24. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, wherein the items comprise mail items.